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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001962

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL, INR/AA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT YAR'ADUA DEMARCHES U.S. AND UK TO  
PROVIDE LONG-TERM EXPERTS ON CONDUCTING CREDIBLE 2011  
ELECTIONS

REF: AMB SANDERS-A/S CARSON E-MAIL 10/27

Classified By: Ambassador Robin Renee Sanders  
for reasons in Sections 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (U) This is an action request telegram; please see last paragraph.

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SUMMARY

¶2. (C) Nigerian President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua delivered a personal demarche to the Ambassador and British High Commissioner, requesting long-term experts to help the Nigerian Government (GON) conduct credible elections. During a one-hour meeting, he said he wanted the U.S. and UK governments to assign experts on the ground from start to finish of the electoral process to train, guide, and advise the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). He said, absent such assistance, it was unlikely that the 2011 elections would be credible, and he would fail to achieve this important goal for Nigeria. He said he has "heard" the international community," and after review, he determined that this was the only way to achieve success. Yar'Adua pledged to allow experts free reign in advising and training INEC and identifying any shortcomings in procedures. He also promised to put in his 2010 budget a direct appropriation for INEC which he would work with the National Assembly to pass so that INEC can have an autonomous budget for its operations. END SUMMARY.

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PLEA FOR HELP

¶3. (C) (C) President Yar'Adua summoned the Ambassador and British High Commissioner to the Presidential Villa October 27 to "discuss electoral reform." No "plus ones" were allowed to attend. After providing a 20-minute briefing in the presence of Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe on Niger Delta, post-amnesty challenges, and corruption, Yar'Adua delivered in the remaining 40 minutes a personal demarche seeking U.S. and UK experts to help the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) oversee and run the 2011 national elections from start to finish. After thorough review of the challenges involved, Yar'Adua said, he remained convinced

that credible elections could not occur without this. He said he was committed to electoral reform and that this was the only way that he believed a successful election to be possible. He appealed to both governments to assign experts to arrive within four to five weeks and remain in country throughout the entire electoral process until the day after the April 2011 elections. He envisioned having such experts revamp INEC from top to bottom, serving as experts on best practices for conducting proper elections. Such experts would give advice, guidance, and monitor capacity, and train INEC officials on all processes necessary for holding free and fair elections, including how to have transparent voter registration, accreditation of political parties and candidates, and other electoral processes such as logistical support. Such experts, he explained, would train INEC on what to do and how to do it and identify where INEC officials performed well or poorly.

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FUNDING TO BE WORKED OUT  
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¶4. (C) Yar'Adua said on the issue of funding that his government would "not necessarily" require financial assistance as GON resources would be used. Nonetheless, he would welcome whatever financial support from other governments that would help assist with such experts. Ambassador asked that more clarity be provided on what the President had in mind regarding GON plans for funding his election-expert program.

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STATUS OF INEC CHAIRPERSON  
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¶5. (C) Yar'Adua said he took to heart comments by the President and Secretary that Nigeria and South Africa should lead the way on democracy in Africa. He openly questioned how he could tell others in Guinea and Niger to respect democratic processes and avoid military coups, if his own government did not conduct credible elections. President Yar'Adua explained that he also had heard the international community's call for the removal of current INEC Chairperson Maurice Iwu. He stated that the Constitution does not allow for him to summarily remove the Chairperson; to do so would be extra-constitutional and he would not do this. The Constitution only allows him to remove Iwu under two conditions: mental incapacitation and legal proof of gross incompetence. Moreover, he argued, democratic institutions and processes involved more than one person. Yar'Adua said he wanted to move beyond Iwu the person and gain help on the overall election process. He indicated that he would be prepared to instruct Iwu and INEC colleagues to hold off on any further preparations for the 2011 elections, once he received assurances from the U.S. and UK to provide such experts on the ground soonest to ensure that the process correctly started.

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ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY  
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¶6. (C) Ambassador asked about the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the President's election-expert plan, given the sensitivity the GON has had on CSO participation on these issues in the recent past. Yar'Adua acknowledged the sensitivity but also agreed that civil society had a role to play in conducting free and fair elections. He said he welcomed their participation, provided that they were responsible CSOs that we worked with and that they focused on promoting the best interests of Nigeria rather than vested personal interests. He decried some instances in Nigeria in which failed political parties disguised themselves as civil

society and non-governmental groups to push their personal hidden agendas.

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INDEPENDENT BUDGET FOR INEC  
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17. (C) President Yar'Adua reiterated his support for an autonomous budget for INEC as a first-line charge from the consolidated revenue fund rather than a charge against the federation account. In this manner, INEC would be able to expend such funding without seeking additional approvals from the executive or legislative branches. He pledged to work with the National Assembly to gain approval of an autonomous budget for INEC for 2010 and beyond and also encourage that state-level INECs be moved under the federal-level INEC.

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COMMENT  
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18. (C) U.S. Mission Nigeria views this demarche for assistance as presenting an unparalleled opportunity for us to help the GON conduct free, fair, and credible elections. Additionally, what makes this request even more extraordinary is that Yar'Adua conducted a personal demarche as head of state, "putting his cards plainly on the table" in a private session with just the Foreign Minister and the two chiefs of mission. Yar'Adua displayed impressive mastery of the issues, and spoke forcefully without missing a beat on a full range of issues. We see the potential benefits of supporting this request, although we acknowledge the risks, given that credible elections are priority number one for USG goals in Nigeria. Yar'Adua is stating in no uncertain terms that he cannot do this without more direct assistance from us. He recalled his conversation with the Secretary and wants to live up to his promise to her. Moreover, we recognize that

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Yar'Adua has a vested personal interest in having credible elections, should he run for a second term. END COMMENT.

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ACTION REQUESTED  
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19. (C) Embassy requests guidance on responding to President Yar'Adua on his request for experts and technical assistance for a top-to-bottom revamping of INEC.  
SANDERS